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*Remarks on the History and Authenticity of the Autograph original
of the Annals of the Four Masters, now deposited in the Library
of the Royal Irish Academy.* By GEORGE PETRIE, Esq.,
R.H.A. M.R.I.A. &c.

Read March 16th, 1831.

TO THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL IRISH
ACADEMY.

MY LORD AND GENTLEMEN,

HAVING recently had the good fortune to obtain for the Royal Irish Academy, the most important historical remain of our ancient literature, the original autograph of a portion of the first part or volume, and the whole of the second volume of the work usually designated the Annals of the Four Masters,—I feel it incumbent on me to lay before you a statement of the proofs of its authenticity, together with such circumstances connected with its history, as have hitherto come within my knowledge.

With regard, in the first place, to our acquisition, being the undoubted autograph original of this most invaluable work, it is to be observed that the manuscript itself furnishes the most satisfactory internal evidences, for such a conclusion, evidences even more decisive than those which have been brought forward in support of the autograph originality of the first part, now the chief treasure of the magnificent library of his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, and which

has recently been published through the munificence of that patriotic nobleman.

In the front of these evidences we find, the dedication of the whole work to Fergal O'Gara, Lord of Moy O'Gara and Coolavin, in the County of Sligo, the chieftain, under whose patronage, and for whose use the Annals were compiled ; and this dedication, not a copy in the hand of an ordinary scribe, but committed to the peculiar durability of parchment, and wholly in the hand-writing and signed with the proper signature of Michael O'Clery, the chief of the Four Masters, who were employed in its compilation. As this dedication throws much light on the history of the work, and has not been hitherto published entire, I shall take leave to introduce it here, as literally translated by the venerable Charles O'Conor.

“I invoke the Almighty God that he may pour down every blessing, corporal and spiritual, on Ferall O'Gara, Tiern (Lord) of Moy O'Gara and Culavinne, one of the two knights elected to represent the County of Sligo in the parliament held in Dublin, this present year of our Lord, 1634.

“In every country enlightened by civilization, and confirmed therein through a succession of ages, it has been customary to record the events produced by time. For sundry reasons, nothing was deemed more profitable or honourable than to study and peruse the works of ancient writers, who gave a faithful account of the great men who figured on the stage of life in preceding ages, that posterity might be informed, how their forefathers have employed their time, how long they continued in power, and how they have finished their days.

“I, Michael O'Clery, brother of the Order of St. Francis, (through ten years employed under obedience to my several provincials in collecting materials for our Irish Hagiology,) have waited on you, noble

Ferall O'Gara, as I was well acquainted with your zeal for the glory of God, and the credit of your country. I perceived the anxiety you suffer from the cloud which at present hangs over our ancient Milesian race ; a state of things which has occasioned the ignorance of many, relative to the lives of the holy men, who, in former times, have been the ornaments of our island ; the general ignorance also of our civil history, and of the monarchs, provincial kings, tigherns (lords,) and toisachs (chieftains,) who flourished in this country through a succession of ages, with equal want of knowledge in the synchronism necessary for throwing light on the transactions of each. In your uneasiness on this subject I have informed you, that I entertained hopes of joining to my own labours, the assistance of the antiquarians I held most in esteem, for compiling a body of Annals, wherein those matters should be digested under their proper heads ; judging that should such a compilation be neglected at present, or consigned to a future time, a risk might be run that the materials for it should never again be brought together. In this idea I have collected the most authentic Annals I could find in my travels through the kingdom, (and, indeed, the task was difficult.) Such as I have obtained are arranged in a continued series, and I commit them to the world under your name, noble O'Gara, who stood forward in patronising this undertaking ; you it was who set the antiquarians to work, and most liberally paid them for their labour, in arranging and transcribing the documents before them, in the convent of Dunagall, where the Fathers of that house supplied them with the necessary refreshments. In truth every benefit derivable from our labours is due to your protection and bounty ; nor should it excite jealousy or envy that you stand foremost in this as in other services you have rendered your country ; for by your birth, you are a descendant of the race of Heber, which gave Ireland thirty monarchs, and sixty-one of which race have died in the

odour of sanctity. Eighteen of those holy men are traced to your great ancestor Teig, the son of Kian, and grandson of the celebrated Olioll-Olam, who died King of Munster, A. D. 260. The posterity of that Teig have had great establishments in every part of Ireland, viz. :—The race of Cormac Galeny, in Leyney of Conaght, from whom you are descended, as well as the O'Haras of the same Leyny, and the O'Haras of the Rout ; the O'Carrolls also of Ely, and the O'Conors of Kianachta Glengevin, in Ulster. In proof of your noble extraction here follows your genealogy.

“ Ferall O’Gara thou art the son of Teig, &c. &c.

“ On the 22d January, 1632, this work was undertaken in the convent of Dunagall, and was finished in the same convent on the 10th of August, 1636.

I am thine most affectionately,

“ BROTHER MICHAEL O’CLERY.”

Immediately following this dedication we are presented with the original certificate or *testimonium* of the superiors of the Franciscan convent of Dunagall, in which the Annals were compiled, signed with their autograph signatures, as on the said 10th of August, 1636. This too, is written on parchment, and has also affixed to it the signature of O'Donell, Prince of Tirconnell ; and while I feel it necessary to my purpose to transcribe this *testimonium*, (which I also give in the translation of Mr. O'Conor,) I beg that those interested in the question will observe how considerably it differs in its wording from that prefixed to the Stowe MS., and how far more copious it is in its information relative to the sources from which the work was compiled.

“ The Fathers of the Franciscan Order, subscribers hereunto, do certify that Ferall O’Gara was the nobleman who prevailed on Brother Michael O’Clery to bring together the antiquaries and chronolo-

gers, who compiled the following Annals, (such as it was in their power to collect), and that Ferall O'Gara, aforesaid, rewarded them liberally for their labour.

“ This collection is divided into two parts, and from the beginning to the end has been transcribed in the convent of the brothers of Dunagall, who supplied the transcribers with the necessary viands. The first volume was begun in the same convent, A.D. 1632, when Father Bernardin O'Clery was guardian thereof.

“ The antiquaries and chronologers who were the collectors and transcribers of this work we attest to be Brother Michael O'Clery ; Maurice O'Maoilconary, the son of Torna, who assisted during a month ; Fergus O'Maoilconary, the son of Lochlan also, and both those antiquaries were of the county of Roscommon ; Cucogry O'Clery, another assistant, was of the county of Dunagall, as was Cucogry O'Duigenan of the county of Leitrim ; Conary O'Clery likewise of the county of Dunagall.

“ The old books they collected were the Annals of Clonmacnois, an abbey founded by holy Kiaran, son of the Carpenter ; the Annals of the Island of Saints, on the Lake of Rive; the Annals of Senat Mac Magnus, on the Lake of Erne (now called the Ulster Annals;) the Annals of the O'Maoilconarys ; the Annals of Killronan, compiled by the O'Duigenans. These antiquarians had also procured the Annals of Lacan, compiled by the Mac Firbisses, (after transcribing the greater part of the first volume,) *and from those Lacan Annals they supplied what they thought proper in the blanks they left for any occasional information they could obtain.* The Annals of Clonmacnois, and those of the Island of Saints, came down no farther than the year of our Lord 1227.

“ The second part of this work commences with the year of our Lord 1208 ; and began to be transcribed in the present year, 1635, when Father Christopher Dunlevy was guardian, and these Annals

were continued down to the year 1608, when Father Bernardin O'Clery was for the second time elected Guardian.

" Brother Michael O'Clery above mentioned, Cucogry O'Clery, and Conary O'Clery, have been the transcribers of the Annals from 1332 to 1608. The books from which they transcribed have been the greater part of O'Maoilconary's book ending with the year 1505. The book of the O'Duigenans, aforesaid, from the year 900 to 1563. The book of Senate Mac Magnus ending with 1532; a part also of the book of Cucogry, the son of Dermod O'Clery, from the year 1281 to 1537. The book likewise of Maolin og Mac Bruodin from the year 1588 to 1603; the book moreover of Lugad O'Clery from 1586 to 1602. All those books we have seen in the hands of the antiquaries, who have been the compilers of the present work, together with other documents too many to be mentioned.—In proof of what we have here set forth, we have hereunto annexed our manual signatures in the Convent of Dunagall, August the 10th, 1636.

Signed " BERNARDINUS O'CLERY, *Guardianus, Dungallensis.*
" BROTHER MAURICE DUNLEVY, &c. &c."

Before we proceed further, let us reflect for a moment on the matter furnished by those interesting documents, to which the writers were so anxious to give all possible durability. How prophetic were the just apprehensions of that chief compiler, "that if the work were then neglected, or consigned to a future time, a risk might be run that the materials for it should never again be brought together." Such, indeed, would have been the sad result. Those fearful predictions were made on the very eve of that awful rebellion which caused a revolution of property, and an extent of human affliction, such, perhaps, as no other country ever experienced. In that un-

happy period, nearly all the original materials of this compilation probably perished, for one or two of them only have survived to our times. Even this careful transcript was supposed to have shared the same fate, and its recent discovery may be considered as the result of a chance almost miraculous! What a solemn lesson, then, is here given us of the necessity of giving durability, while yet in our power, to the surviving historical remains of our country, and thereby placing them beyond the reach of a fate otherwise almost inevitable. To me it appears a sacred duty on cultivated minds to do so. Had this compilation been neglected, or had it, as was supposed, shared the fate of its predecessors, what a large portion of our history would have been lost to the world for ever!

But to proceed.—It is to be most pertinently observed, that, from the above *testimonium*, it appears that, in the original manuscripts, the writers left blanks for the purpose of inserting subsequently any occasional information they might obtain, and by a reference to the MS. now under consideration, it will be found that such blanks have been frequently filled up in various parts of the volume.

Secondly—We learn from this *testimonium*, that, contrary to the opinion of Doctor O'Conor and others who have written on the subject, the second part or volume commenced, not as they state, with the year 1172, but with the year 1208. So we find it is in our MS. in which the period from 1170 to 1208 is substantially divided from the subsequent annals, not only by the aforesaid dedication and *testimonium*, but also by a heading prefixed as to the commencement of the second volume.

Thirdly—The *testimonium* states that Michael O'Clery, Cucogry O'Clery, and Conary O'Clery, were the transcribers of the Annals from the year 1332 to the year 1608, and by a reference to our MS. we shall find, not only that the writing of those three scribes is strongly

marked by their individual characteristics, but also be able, by a comparison with any of our own MSS., in the hand-writing of Cucogry O'Clery, to ascertain what portions of the Annals were so written by that admirable scribe.

I have to add to these evidences, another of yet greater importance—namely, that a great number of loose leaves accompany the volume, which, on examination, prove to be the first extracts from the original ancient documents, copied out without much regard to order or chronological arrangement, previously to their being regularly transferred to the work. There are also additions in the hand-writing of Michael O'Clery, the chief of the Four Masters, bringing the Annals down as late as the year 1616, which appears to have been the last entry ever made in the volume.

These evidences will, I trust, be deemed amply sufficient to establish the fact of this MS. being the veritable original autograph of this important work, written, as the title now prefixed to the Trinity College copy properly states, *ad usum Fergalli O'Gara*.—The circumstances relative to its history, which I shall now have the honour to submit, will enable us, I think, to trace its possession with tolerable certainty to the last direct representative of the family of its illustrious patron.

It has been hitherto generally believed that no perfect copy of the Second Part of the Annals of the Four Masters was in existence, and that the mutilated volume in the College Library, which is deficient in the years preceding 1335, and was never carried farther than the year 1605, was the only original to be found. The recent acquisition to our valuable collection of MSS. of a perfect transcript of the whole of the work, proved the supposition to be an error, and that at the period when it was transcribed an original autograph of the second volume had been in existence.

In each of the volumes of this Transcript, we find an advertisement by the Chevalier O'Gorman, for whom the copy was made, stating that "the original of the first volume was the property of Charles O'Conor, Esq. of Belanagare, and the original of the second, *that of the Right Honourable Colonel William Burton Conyngham*, who lent it to Chevalier O'Gorman, by whom it was duly returned to Colonel Conyngham, but has been since mislaid." Thus far we can trace our MS. as being the original from which the Chevalier's copy, now in our possession, was transcribed, and its ownership to Colonel Burton Conyngham, whose library passed, subsequently, into the hands of the late Mr. Austin Cooper, at whose recent sale the work was acquired. The Chevalier O'Gorman's advertisement is without date, but a certificate, in the hand-writing of Charles O'Conor, Esq., is prefixed, stating that the transcript was made for the use of his friend, the Chevalier O'Gorman, in his house at Belanagare: "This," he says, "I testify in Dublin, May the 10th, 1781." Now it is remarkable, that, from a letter written by the Chevalier O'Gorman to Charles O'Conor, dated January 10, 1781, the same year, (published in the *Testimonia* to the first volume of the Annals in the *Rerum Hib. Scriptores*,) we learn that our MS. was, at that time, 'the property' of Charles O'Conor. In this letter the Chevalier says, "I have seen Gorman" (the Scribe) "this morning, I find he has copied but the first volume of the Four Masters, which Colonel Burton told me you were pleased to return to him. I expected he would not only have copied the second, but also, the Annals of Connaught, *both your property*." From this it appears certain that our MS. had belonged to Charles O'Conor, previously to its being transferred to the possession of Colonel Conyngham, but for what reason that transfer was made it is not for me to conjecture.

Let us now proceed a little earlier, and we shall find that Mr.

O'Conor got the original copy of the Annals made for the O'Gara, from the direct representative of that Lord, as early as the year 1734. In the *Prologomena* to the first volume of the *Rerum Hib. Scriptores*, p. 51, the following extract is given from a letter written by Charles O'Conor to Doctor Curry, and dated Roscommon, July the 16th, 1756.

"In regard to the Four Masters, I shall write to Colonel O'Gara, in St. Sebastian, where he is quartered with his regiment, and reproach him with giving more of his confidence to a little ignorant ecclesiastic, than to me his nearest relation in this kingdom, his father and mine being brother and sister's children. I got that work in 1734, through the interest of Bishop O'Rourke, my uncle." It is remarkable that this same letter is again quoted in the '*Testimonia*,' prefixed to the Annals, in the second volume of the same work, but as addressed, not to Doctor Curry, but to a Mr. O'Reilly. It also differs in the wording, as will appear from the following extract: "I shall write to Colonel O'Gara, &c." "This expedient will, I hope, confirm the book (the Annals of the Four Masters) to me." From this it would appear, that, though he had gotten the work from the O'Gara family, as early as 1734, there was, nevertheless, a claim put forward relative to it, on the part of some branch of that family so late as 1756. In the same '*Testimonia*,' p. 11, Doctor O'Conor quotes his grandfather as writing that he obtained the work in 1734, from Brian O'Gara, Archbishop of Tuam, viz.—

"Liber hic nunc pertinet ad Cathaldum juniores O'Conor, filium Donchadi, &c., et ejusdem libri possessio tributa fuit ei per Brianum O'Gara, Archiepiscopum præclararum Tuamiæ, A. D. 1734.

"CATHALDUS O'CONOR."

And in the memoirs of his grandfather, written by Doctor O'Conor, there is the following passage: "Colonel O'Gara, who commanded a

regiment under James the Second, made a present of the Four Masters to Doctor O'Rourke, Mr. O'Conor's uncle, who gave it to him : it is now in his library, and an autograph."—*Memoirs*, p. 256.

Lastly—In his account of the MSS. in the Stowe library, Doctor O'Conor says, "This volume was carried into Spain by Colonel O'Gara, who commanded the Irish regiment of *Hibernia*, in the Spanish service, in 1734. He sent it to his relative, the late Charles O'Conor, of Belanagare, as the person best qualified to make use of it."

In these various accounts there is evidently some mystification or error which it is not easy to understand ; but the object in all seems to be to prove, first, that the original autograph of the Four Masters belonging to the O'Gara family was given to Mr. O'Conor; and secondly, that the volume now at Stowe, was that very one so obtained. The first of these positions may be readily granted,—the second, however, appears to me to be extremely doubtful, and for the following reasons :—Bishop Nicholson, in his *Irish Historical Library*, published in 1724, describes *that very volume* as being *then* in the Irish manuscript collection of Mr. John Conry, (or O'Maoilconaire,) a descendant of one of the compilers, who had also in his possession the imperfect copy of the second volume, now deposited in the library of Trinity College. Doctor O'Conor himself acknowledges this fact, in the '*Testimonia*,' and indeed it does not admit of a doubt.

What claim then, we may ask, could the O'Gara Family have to these volumes ?—and how could Colonel O'Gara have carried them into Spain ?—and how could he, or the Archbishop, bestow the former on any one ?

Moreover, we find that in seven years after, that is, in 1731, those MSS. of Conry's were on sale, and that Charles O'Conor appears to have been the purchaser. In that year he writes thus to his friend,

Doctor Fergus, relative to their purchase for him : “ Dear Sir, I beg you will take the trouble of purchasing for me, Conry’s MSS., now in the hands of Charles O’Neil,” &c. ; and further on, he says, “ I again request that you will be active in procuring for me Conry’s MSS.—my collection is very imperfect, and I wish to save as many as I can of the ancient MSS. of Ireland from the wreck that has almost overwhelmed every thing that once belonged to us.”—(Memoir of C. O’Conor, p. 173.) That he did succeed in possessing himself of these MSS. can hardly admit of a doubt, as most of them can be traced as belonging to him subsequently. It was the same Doctor Fergus, to whom this letter was addressed, that, as Mr. O’Conor states, put the first volume of the Annals into better condition for him in 1734, (the very year in which he got the work from Bishop O’Rourke,) giving it, as he said, “ vigour enough to outlive another century.” And it was from the hands of the same gentleman, Doctor Fergus, that the imperfect copy of the second volume, together with other works of Conry’s collection, which had undoubtedly been the property of Mr. O’Conor, passed into the library of Trinity College. That Mr. O’Conor should have parted with that mutilated volume will not appear strange, if we account for it by the supposition of his having had our perfect volume in his possession at the time.

It is of importance to this sketch also to add, that the first volume, now at Stowe, as well as the second in Trinity College, afford internal evidences of their being, not the original autographs of the work, but transcripts made by one of the writers for his own individual use. These internal evidences are, that the volume in Trinity College library *is written uniformly throughout by the same hand*—and we have the testimony of Doctor Fergus prefixed to it, stating, that the second volume agrees in every respect, as to paper, writing, &c. &c., with the first volume now at Stowe. In this, Doctor O’Conor concurs, who says emphatically, *it is all in the one hand*—the hand of Michael

O'Clery.—(Catalogue of the Stowe MSS.) Further, it is to be observed, that those volumes were evidently transcribed from the originals before the work was entirely completed, for there are no entries after the year 1605, though the dates are placed at the tops of succeeding pages for some years later, and the blanks left to be filled up whenever any additional information might be procured, have never received such additions as they have in our manuscript. It should be remarked also, that the certificate and dedication prefixed to the Stowe MS. are written on paper, not parchment, as in our MS.

Under all these circumstances, I trust I shall not be deemed rash in concluding, that the MS. now bought for the Academy is not only the original autograph of the work, but also, that there is scarcely a doubt of its being the very copy which passed from the representative of the O'Gara family, into the hands of Mr. Charles O'Conor, and which subsequently became the property of Colonel Burton Conyngham, at the recent sale of whose books I had the good fortune to purchase it.

I have now no ordinary feeling of pleasure in resigning to its most proper depository, the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, this truly inestimable work, which, in the words of Mr. O'Reilly, "is far above all our other Annals in point of value;" and as I have had the good fortune to purchase this work at my own risk, and might, by letting it pass out of the country, have been a great pecuniary gainer, I trust it will not be deemed presumption in me to indulge the hope, that the resignation of it will be received as a memorial of my attachment to the ancient literature of my country, and of my zeal for the interests of the learned body to which I feel it so great an honour to belong.

GEORGE PETRIE.

March 5, 1831.